

DOCUMENT FILE

NOTE

SEE 884.6113-Wabi Shebeli/1 FOR # 226

FROM Abyssinia (Southard) DATED July 15, 1929
TO NAME 1-1127 GPO

REGARDING: Italian investigations of the Wabi Shebeli River in Ethiopia and Somaliland and their proposed irrigation works in Ethiopia to divert water to the Somaliland. Duke of the Abruzzi, who is much interested in agriculture in Somaliland, pushing most of the work. Possibilities of irrigating large areas which will then be productive agricultural land.

8658.6113 / 1

INDEX BUREAU

Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia.

July 15th, 1929.

No. 226.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to make the following preliminary reference to a new and possibly important Italian enterprise related to Ethiopia.

In the Legation's No. 84 of October 26th, 1928, report was made of the departure from Addis Ababa for an overland trip to Italian Somaliland of an expedition headed by the Italian Duke of the Abruzzi. This expedition has since explored the Wabi Shebelle river from its source southeast of Addis Ababa on into Italian Somaliland where the river dwindles down to the Indian Ocean.

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The Duke's exploration party was under Italian official auspices and carried with it various official meteorologists, cartographers, etc., etc. The expedition reached Italian Somaliland in February of this year after a journey of a hundred days and fifteen hundred kilometers. A published report has been intimated. As this report has not yet reached Addis Ababa the Legation has decided not to wait longer before submitting this preliminary comment, upon which a latter and more detailed despatch may be based.

The Legation has been moved particularly to action at the present time by having just learned confidentially that the local Italian Legation has, by instruction from Rome, made tentative inquiries of the Ethiopians as to the possibility of procuring either a concession or a contract for irrigation control works along the course of the Wabi Shebeli in Ethiopia which would permit distribution and delivery of its water in Italian Somaliland for the aid of agricultural projects. The particular project in mind is the Societa Agricola Italo-Somala originated by the Duke of the Abruzzi. It is thought likely that the Ethiopians would grant a concession for the Wabi Shebeli area, which is conquered Moslem territory and not of particular sentimental interest to them, should the Italians come through with the usual financial inducements

ments for which they are alleged lately to have set a fast pace in Ethiopia.

The Wabi Shebelle is one of the most important of the few Ethiopian rivers when considered from the viewpoint of periodical volume of flow and the potentially large area subject to its waters. The source of the river has been placed in a part of the rich Province of Sidamo where rain falls practically from the middle of February until December of each year, as compared with the regular rainy season from about the middle of June until the middle of September over most of the Ethiopian plateau. This plentiful rainfall contributes to the considerable volume of water carried during most of the year by the Wabi Shebelle, but of which much is absorbed by the desert lowlands of Ethiopia and of Italian Somaliland en route to the Indian Ocean. The river flows through undeveloped and little known country and no systematic or engineering effort has ever been made to conserve and use its waters in Ethiopia. For the extensive agricultural effort on the semi-desert Italian Somaliland side, however, there could be developed great irrigation by conserving and controlling the river waters before they finally leave the Ethiopian highlands. The well known activities of the Duke of the Abruzzi in developing agriculture in the Somaliland colony have been made difficult by the lack of water; hence his very direct interest in

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the Wabi Shebelle.

Not only would the Duke's particular projects be benefitted by control of this river but a vast area of the Somali coastal plain would conceivably be prepared for Italian colonization. The Legation understands that there is much available cotton land which requires only the water now wasted during the flood periods of the Wabi Shebelle.

Incidentally, Italian interest in favor of the granting of the Lake Tsana project to the White Engineering Corporation may reasonably be accelerated now that they have their own similar project in the shape of the proposed Wabi Shebelle control. Italian influence could be of no direct value in facilitating the issuance of the Tsana contract but it may be accepted that they will now have less incentive to endeavor by means particularly their own to retard Ethiopian action with reference to Tsana. As the Legation interprets local conditions the granting of the Tsana contract in Anglo-American interest would be of immediate value to the Italians as argument for the Ethiopians to take reasonably prompt action in the Wabi Shebelle project. The Italians are assumed to realize this circumstance.

This preliminary report is all that is justified by the information so far available to or procurable
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by the Legation. It is hoped that details for a more comprehensive report will develop before too long.

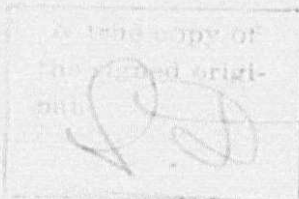
The important point to record at this time is that the Italians are continuing here their energetic development of African colonial possibilities and have now in mind for the Jabi Shebelle what promises to be another very important and far reaching enterprise.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,


ADDISON R. SOUTHARD.

File 860.2/861.1.
AES/sid.



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